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African Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics

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AFRICAN TRANSFORMATIVE AGENDA FOR OFFICIAL STATISTICS

I. PREAMBLE

The Global Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics, that took place in New York in January 2015, aimed at formulating an adequate response to the increased demand for detailed and timely data to monitor progress on the goals and targets of the post-2015 development agenda. The consultation of Heads of National and International Statistical Organisations resulted in a strong commitment from countries to pursue the process of establishing a sustainable framework for the modernization of national, regional and global statistical systems. Furthermore, the 46th session of the United Nations Statistical Commission that took place in March 2015 on the theme ‘better data, better lives’, recognised the emerging demands for high-quality statistics and the need for modernisation of national regional and international statistical systems.

Building on these outcomes, and taking stock of various international, regional and national initiatives for integrating and modernizing statistical systems, the African Conference on a Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics, held on 21-22 November 2015 in Libreville, Gabon, conducted an in-depth discussion of the Transformative Agenda in the context of the African Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Following this, the Forty-Seventh Session of the United Nations Statistical Commission (47th UNSC) on the Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics reconfirmed the necessity to modernize and strengthen statistical systems, at the national, regional and global levels, and encouraged the completion of the series of regional conferences and the formulation of regional road maps for a transformative agenda through the moderation of the five thematic areas described in the report.

The Action Plan for African Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics takes into account the key challenges for aligning National and Regional Strategies for the Development of Statistics with the Objectives of the Transformative Agenda that are:

- The inadequate resource allocations to statistics;
- The institutional and organizational weaknesses;
- The weak statistical legislations;
- The low prioritization and the low investment in statistics;
- The inadequate IT infrastructure;
- The inadequate technical and managerial capacities.

It also builds on the key opportunities that are:

- Increased demand for relevant, high-quality and timely data to support development agendas.
- The Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.
- The Africa Agenda 2063.
- The regional integration agendas.
- The national Development Plans.
- The strong support of pan African institutions and partners.
- The existence of international and continental principles, frameworks and strategies.
- The new innovative and transformative ICT options in data collection, processing and dissemination.
- The non-traditional data sources such as big data offer opportunities for supplementing official sources.

The Action Plan for African Transformative Agenda for Official Statistics builds on the five thematic areas of the Global Transformative Agenda.

Thematic area 1: Coordination at and between the global, continental, (sub-) regional and national statistical systems

The focus of this thematic area is better coordinating the statistical programmes developed by international organizations and linking them the political agendas and reporting obligations. The report ‘A World that Counts’, published by the Independent Expert Advisory Group (IEAG) on data revolution for sustainable development calls for a better coordination of statistical programmes developed by international organizations. Drivers for the transformation of national statistical systems on the African continent are roughly the same as those identified at the global level but they also have to deal with more specific needs such as the Agenda 2063, the African Charter on Statistics and the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA).

There is already an African Statistical System that promotes statistical development efforts in Africa to enhance the statistical capacity of African countries. The African Statistical System supports through collaboration the timely production of reliable, comprehensive and comparable sets of official statistics based on agreed principles, concepts and standards for evidence-based policy decision making at the country and regional level in Africa.

The African Statistical System Builds on a certain number of strategic initiatives:

The African Charter on Statistics

The African Charter on Statistics was endorsed by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union in 2009 and came to power on May 2014 following by its ratification by sixteen (16) countries. The Charter serves as a tool for statistical advocacy to commit African Governments to scale up support to statistics, develop statistics in a manner consistent with best practice and international standards and use statistics for policy development and decision making at all levels.

The Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa

The Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA) is a continent-wide effort in support of the African integration agenda. Its objective is to provide the African statistical system with a general framework for producing quality and harmonized statistics for the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the integration process and related development policies in Africa. The Strategy aims at identifying priority areas in statistics to support the African integration process and decision making at the highest level by African leaders. The African Union, ECA and AfDB have prepared an action plan for implementing the Strategy with details on the expected outputs, activities, timeframe and responsibilities.

The African Peer Review Mechanism

The Statistical Peer Review is conducted by the African Union Statistics Division in collaboration with member states to monitor the implementation of the African Charter on Statistics. The Division prepares and disseminates reports with the results.

Thematic area 2: Communication and advocacy

The priorities in this thematic area are branding official statistics to differentiate them from other data providers, improve communication of the value and comparative advantages of official statistics to mobilize more resources, build partnerships, share best practices, create thematic communities and use modern communication tools. Targeted communication and advocacy strategy on the value and principles for official statistics could help redress the situation of insufficient funding and dependence on external sources; tenuous institutional and legal statistical frameworks, fragile data governance and accountability; lack of timely, accurate, comparable and relevant data; and weak demand and capacity in the use of data for decision making at (sub-) regional, national and local level.

Thematic area 3: Innovation and modernization through standard-based statistical business architecture

This thematic area aims at harnessing the innovative and transformational power of ICT for official statistics and promoting an effective collaboration to build set of principles and standards for use in modernizing official statistics. In order to support modernization

and integration, statistical production processes and tools should be based on a common and collaborative statistical corporate business architecture. This architecture should reflect not only the traditional socio-economic information system of national statistics but should fully involve the national spatial information system. The latter should include also the geo-referencing of socio-economic and environmental information. This would facilitate the integration of surveys, the use of alternative/complementary data sources, the exploitation of georeferenced information systems as well as the development of an articulated and coherent metadata repository.

The latest technological developments would allow the development of “statistical clouds/data hubs” of anonymized micro data addressing the demand from researchers and the international community for more disaggregated information. The initiative for the establishment of African centres of excellence and the creation of modern regional data labs for joint development of IT applications and training were also mentioned as positive developments in support of the modernization and integration of official statistics.

Thematic area 4: Integrated statistical systems

The new ICT environment with an accelerated technological progress and the availability of non-traditional “real time” data generated through satellite imaging, social media, mobile phone use and other sensory devices require repositioning of the role of the national statistical system. The transformative agenda calls upon more integrated statistical systems and moving away from traditional ‘silo’ approach of statistical agencies and related production processes. Integrated statistics programme will help in the production of more consistent, timely and relevant statistics, reducing the administrative burden on respondents and the costs of production of statistics. Leadership and coordination mechanisms and tools at the institutional, management and technical levels, are key factors to ensure efficiency and coherence within a national statistical system. Furthermore, strategic development plans such as NSDSs and master plans are the proper vehicles to set up the road maps to modernization. These strategies should be translated into operational programmes and be complemented by monitoring and evaluation tools and mechanisms. They should also be complemented with initiatives for the recruitment, development and retention of human resources (human capital) and continuous efforts to develop the technical infrastructure and information technology.

Continuous communication from the top management within and outside the national statistical office about the needs for and benefits of integration and modernization is needed to secure the adherence to the transformation and sustain an efficient and effective implementation of these strategies.

Proper quality management framework and practices are also required to ensure that throughout the modernization process, statistical information remains fit-for-purpose. Quality considerations should support the modernization process and therefore be embedded in any initiative and strategy related to the transformation of official statistics.

Thematic area 5: Capacity building and training

The national statistical office should take a stronger coordination role within the national statistical system and ensure that technical capacity building and cooperation activities to be less donor oriented and more demand driven. Transformation is not only IT driven but mainly relies on human capital and discussed the gap between available abilities and what should be the “profile” of employees of national statistical offices in 5 or 10 years. Universities should put in place statistical curricula but also that this would not be sufficient for producers of official statistics, at least in the short and medium term, to get highly-qualified and fit-for-purpose manpower. Technical abilities should be complemented with technological, analytical, communication and managerial skills. Thus, the biggest challenge would be to convince present staff members to embrace modernization and integration whereas they have been evolving during years in a more stove piped business architecture. In order to secure this cultural shift, it would be essential for the top management to communicate with staff members the advantages of the transformation and identify champions that could relay the message to peers.

II. Overview of Strategic Plan

Thematic area 1: Coordination at and between the global, continental, (sub-) regional and national statistical systems

Key Actions:

- Advance the alignment of the 2063, the 2030 and the transformative agendas to support the establishment of an integrated funded programme consisting of actions for the 5 cross-cutting functional components of the transformative agenda;
- Promote and maintaining a high level political commitment to develop and sustain sound institutional and organizational frameworks for the production of official statistics at the level of the continent, the (sub-) regions and the countries (Agenda 2063) based on common statistical corporate business architecture and mainstreaming the international statistical standards and principles of official statistics;
- Recognize, on the national levels, the national statistical offices as the central coordinators not only for the production of statistics but beyond that also for the design and implementation of the new statistical production architecture including for the national geo-referenced social, economic and spatial information system. Also recognizing the leadership of heads of statistics as a driving force for the transformation to take place;
- Incorporate into the guidelines for NSDS, presently under revision, reflections and recommendations about the transformation of official statistics aiming at facilitating the establishment of concrete national roadmaps (operational programmes) for modernization and integration of statistics aligned with national, regional, continental and global development agendas;
- Introduce a strong governance and coordination mechanism at the African continent level such as a High-level Steering Committee on the Transformative Agenda led by the Pan-African institutions that would articulate and implement a coordinated 5 thematic areas programme for the transformation and modernization of official statistics in the context of the 2063, SHaSa and 2030 Agendas;

- Incorporate the development of specific 5 thematic areas cross cutting programs for African countries at (sub-) regional level aiming at deepening and sharing good practices, knowledge and tools on the transformation and modernization of national statistical systems;
- Recognize the importance of south-south cooperation in fostering and sharing innovative solutions to challenges and constraints affecting developing countries specifically.

Thematic area 2: Communication and advocacy

Key Actions:

- Recognize that the momentum is right to attract the proper attention to modernization of statistics and to advocate for an active participation of official statisticians in the design, implementation and evaluation of development strategies;
- Align global, (sub-) regional and national communication strategies and programmes aiming at addressing the value of official statistics at different level of maturity;
- Advocate for the rather limited investments and operational costs for developing and maintaining adequate statistical capacities in comparison with the positive impact of statistics and indicators for evidence-based decision making; in particular with the monitoring of the progress towards the objectives of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and the Agenda 2063;
- Engage policy makers and other stakeholders through enhanced communication strategies and advocacy for the appropriation of the necessary financial and human resources, infrastructure and technologies from national own resources for a sustainable transformation and modernization of statistical capacities;
- Address the issue of high staff turnover by ensuring competitive remuneration and other nonmonetary compensations in order to secure human resources and skills to drive and contribute to the transformation and modernization of national statistical systems;
- Improve partnership with the data communities, data producers and users, and other stakeholders aiming at promoting and sustaining the modernization and integration of statistics.

Thematic area 3: Innovation and modernization through standard-based statistical business architecture

Key Actions:

- Map existing business processes, technology architecture, information systems and capabilities using available generic tools such as those developed under the auspices of the High-level Group for the Modernization of Official Statistics, for example the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM);
- Advance standardization of the components of statistical production within and across national statistical systems using for example the Common Statistical Production Architecture (CSPA) that provides principles and guidelines for mainstreaming statistical processes and for creating the favorable environment for the implementation of standardized IT infrastructure initiatives such as the Strategy for the Harmonization of Statistics in Africa (SHaSA);
- Foster the development of mobile devices and other e-data collection and processing technologies aiming at realizing cost efficiencies, improving effectiveness, securing timeliness and data quality as well as reducing response burden;
- Develop continental and/or regional repositories of open software with dedicated deployment and operational support (e.g. helpdesk);

- Explore the feasibility of continental and/or regional centres in charge of maintaining and lending hardware and mobile devices for temporary deployment in the framework of specific data collection and processing activities such as population, housing, agricultural and business census operations;
- Foster the development and the deployment of innovative and user-friendly data extraction and visualization tools (e.g. mobile devices apps) to extend the outreach of official statistics and facilitate their understanding and interpretation;
- Establish common data and metadata portals and exploring practices of cloud computing considering the open data concept. In that perspective, exploring the idea of mainstreaming statistical data and metadata exchange standards such as SDMX and HTML;
- Develop dedicated facilities that focus on the training of the staff of the statistical offices that supports the environment of a modern statistical office as sketched in the indents above with a combination of it skills, analytical abilities and domain knowledge (see also below, fifth thematic area: capacity building and training).

Fourth thematic area 4: Integrated statistical systems

Key Actions:

- Redesign of the production processes at the country level based on a standards-based service-oriented business and information architecture for official statistics;
- Foster institutional arrangements of national statistical systems with the aim to enhance adherence to the Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and the African Charter on Statistics such as governance and coordination, professional independence and objectivity, confidentiality, effectiveness and efficiency, access to secondary data sources and quality assurance frameworks;
- Adopt a corporate management approach of statistical activities and gradually introducing cross-functional corporate services units in the national statistical agencies for planning and monitoring, methodology, quality assurance, data collection, and IT services;
- Adopt and implement comprehensive quality management and monitoring policies at continental, (sub-) regional and national level based on internationally agreed quality assurance frameworks such as the IMF Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF) and the UNSD Generic National Quality Assurance Framework (NQAF);
- Develop a comprehensive human resource policy in order to attract and retain know-how that can contribute to the modernisation and integration of statistics such as data scientists, IT specialists and change managers;
- Mainstream integrated and metadata driven data collection, processing and dissemination programmes for environment, social, demographic and business statistics using as much as possible the potential of administrative data. Exploring the potential of Big Data for the production of integrated official statistics as a complement to traditional data sources;
- Advance the access to and dissemination of anonymised microdata for population, household and business censuses and surveys, in particular for research purposes;
- Promote the role of the national statistical office as the main coordinating entity of the national statistical system including strategic programmes for the transformation of official statistics.

Thematic area 5: Capacity building and training

Key Actions:

- Conduct at regular intervals reviews of national statistical systems assessing the institutional, organizational and technical readiness to move to the next level of maturity in regards to modernization and providing recommendations to be incorporated into the NSDS and articulated into road maps;
- Align capacity building and training programmes with revamped NSDS and related roadmaps (action plans) for the modernization and integration of official statistics;
- Reinforce and support the role of the national statistical office as focal point and national coordinator of capacity building activities and technical cooperation projects in the field of statistics;
- Develop at global and continental level an e-learning programme and a repository of training material for official statistics;
- Complement existing training programmes and university curricula at national, regional and continental level with specific courses related to modernization and integration of official statistics such as change management, e-data collection, geo-referenced statistics, integrated production, data analysis and visualization, communication and quality management;
- Introduce the possibility, when relevant and appropriate, to open specific national training courses, including e-learning, to statisticians from other countries;
- Explore possible governance structure and operational mechanisms for pooling human resources and technical infrastructure such as tablet for geo-referenced census operations within and across national statistical systems.

III. Next Steps

- Establish African Group on the Transformation Agenda for Official Statistics;
- Report to the Statistical Commission and regional statistical committees.